



SECRET EMPIRE: OPENING SALVO

MARVEL

#16

SPENCER
LIBRANDA
CINAR
MALIN
ROSENBERG

Steve ★ Rogers

CAPTAIN AMERICA



Super-Soldier. Avenger. Agent of Hydra. He is...

Steve★Rogers
**CAPTAIN
AMERICA**



Steve Rogers' reality has been secretly rewritten by Kobik, a sentient Cosmic Cube acting under the influence of the Red Skull. In Steve's new history, a Hydra agent named Elisa Sinclair--A.K.A. Madame Hydra--took Steve from his mother and enrolled him in a school where he was trained to believe in Hydra's ideals. He also befriended a young Helmut Zemo, whose father, Heinrich, would later be killed by Bucky Barnes.

In the present, Zemo and Madame Hydra have returned to Steve's side, and the pieces are falling into place for a complete Hydra takeover. Steve killed the Red Skull and assumed control of his forces, Madame Hydra gathered a new Hydra High Council, and Zemo routed the Thunderbolts and captured Bucky, but Kobik was shattered in the process.* Meanwhile, fugitive former S.H.I.E.L.D. Director Maria Hill is closing in on the truth...

***WARNING! READ THIS ISSUE AFTER THUNDERBOLTS #12, ON SALE NOW!**

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Captain America created by Joe Simon & Jack Kirby

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ENGLAND.
1945.

STEVEN,
MY DEAR...

...YOU'VE BARELY LITTERED A
WORD THE WHOLE JOURNEY.
NOT THAT I MINDED ENTIRELY,
I DID GET TO FINISH
MY BOOK.

GERALD
GARDNER, SUCH AN
EXHIBITIONIST.

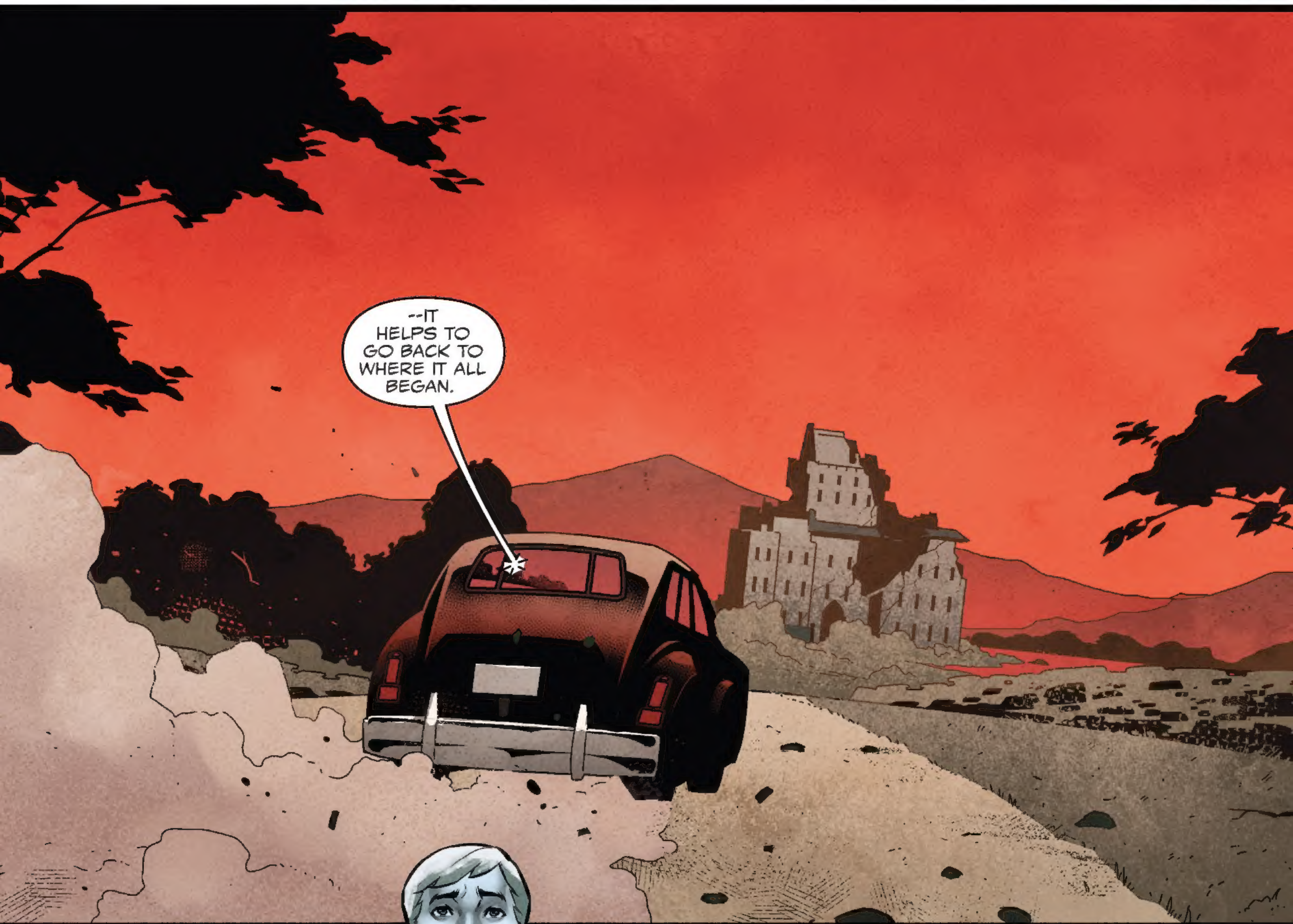
HOW CAN
YOU **READ** AT A
TIME LIKE THIS,
ELISA?!

"HYDRA
IS LOST.

"THE RED
SKULL HAS
TAKEN IT
FROM US.

"MEANWHILE, MY
BEST FRIEND IS
SITTING IN AN ALLIED
PRISON CELL, WAITING
FOR THE **FIRING
SQUAD**...

"AND ON TOP OF EVERYTHING--
NOW YOU TELL ME THE
AMERICANS HAVE DEVELOPED
SOME KIND OF **SUPER-
WEAPON** THAT WILL HELP
THEM WIN THE WAR."



BAGALIA. TODAY.

Maria Hill's
log--

Okay, yes--
it's been a
rough month.

I was ousted
as director of
S.H.I.E.L.D.--

--by the very
tribunal I
established.
Humiliating.

From there,
I've just been
wandering, looking
for a way back in.

Which led me to
Bagalia, where a couple
of mercenary types--
Taskmaster and the
Black Ant--made some
very big promises.

They said they had
something that could
bring down the new
director of S.H.I.E.L.D.--
Steve Rogers, Captain
America himself.

They never
showed up with
the goods--

--but I
was curious
enough--okay,
desperate
enough--

--that I
had to
see what
they
found.



It took me a few minutes, but once I was in Taskmaster's place, I got what I came for--



--and then some.

HAIL HYDRA.



There must be some explanation. This has to be a fake. There's no way this can be--



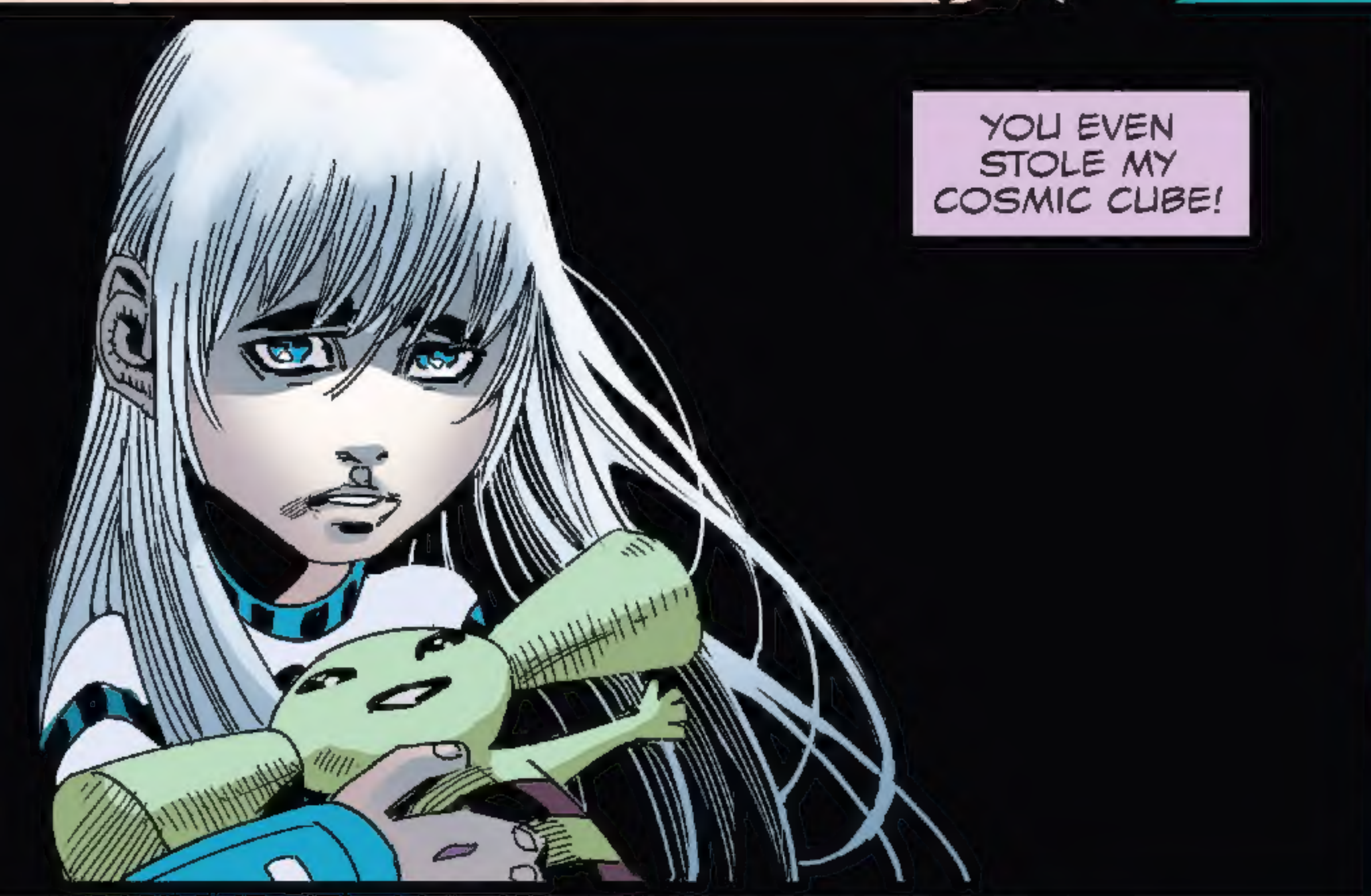
--real.



I HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR THIS, PRETENDER...

TO SEE YOU PUNISHED FOR ALL THE THINGS YOU HAVE DONE TO ME.

YOU TURNED MY OWN FOLLOWERS, THE THUNDERBOLTS, AGAINST ME, CLAIMING THEM FOR YOUR OWN.

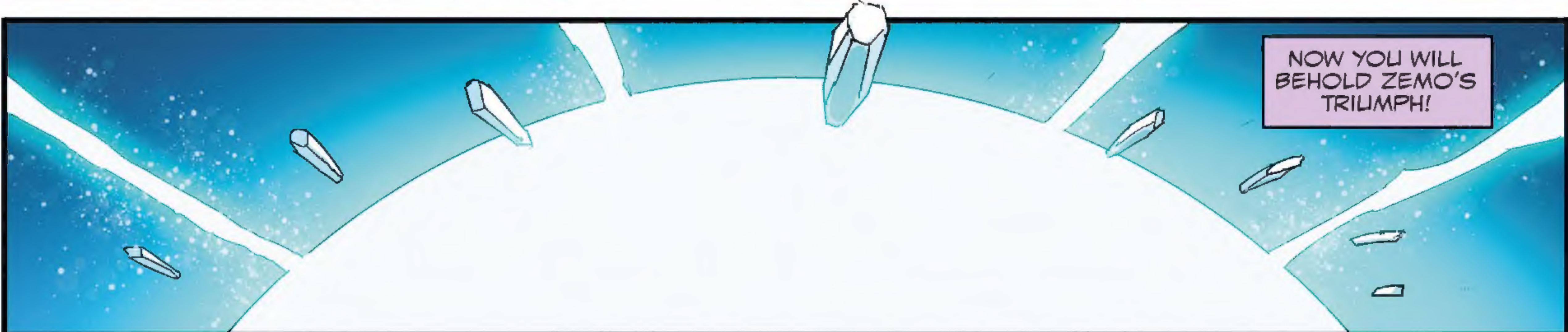


YOU EVEN STOLE MY COSMIC CUBE!



YOUR SINS ARE SO MANY, AND SPAN ACROSS REALITIES--

--BUT NOW, AT LAST, YOU WILL ANSWER FOR THEM.



NOW YOU WILL BEHOLD ZEMO'S TRIUMPH!





1945.

NOW, LET'S
SEE IF WE CAN
FIND A KETTLE AND AN
OPEN FLAME, YES?
I'M POSITIVELY
DRAINED--

ELISA--
WHAT THE
HELL IS
THIS?!

WHY WOULD
YOU BRING ME
BACK HERE? WHY
WOULD YOU WANT
ME TO **SEE**
THIS?

JUST SO
I'D KNOW THAT
EVERYTHING I EVER
WORKED FOR--
EVERYTHING I EVER
FOUGHT FOR--WAS
LOST? YOU THINK
I DON'T REALIZE
THAT ALREADY?

HYDRA IS
RUINED. WE THOUGHT
WE COULD MANIPULATE
THE REICH TO SUIT OUR
WHIMS, AND INSTEAD THEY
DEVoured US
WHOLE.

BUT THEN
AGAIN, MAYBE IT'S
WHAT WE **DESERVE**.
MAYBE ALL OF THIS
ISN'T WHAT I TOLD
MYSELF IT WAS.

MAYBE IT
WAS ALL A **LIE**.
YOU SAID THIS WAS
WHERE IT ALL
BEGAN--

--BUT IT
WASN'T. NOT FOR
ME. I WASN'T BORN
HERE LIKE SOME OF
THE OTHERS. I WAS
BROUGHT
HERE.

AFTER
YOU TOOK
ME--

"--AFTER YOU
KILLED MY
MOTHER."



OH,
STEVEN--

NO.
DON'T.



IT TOOK
ME **YEARS** TO
ACCEPT IT. AND EVEN
THEN, I TRIED TO TELL
MYSELF THAT--THAT ALL OF
THIS HAD HAPPENED FOR
A PURPOSE. THAT
SHE DIED FOR
A REASON.

BUT THAT
ISN'T **TRUE**,
IS IT?



IT WAS JUST MADMEN THIRSTING FOR
POWER. THE IDEALS, THE BELIEFS--NONE
OF IT WAS **REAL**. JUST WHAT YOU
TOLD THE CANNON FODDER.

AND NOW
ALL THAT'S LEFT
IS TO POUR SALT IN
THE WOUND BEFORE
YOU SEND ME OUT ON
ANOTHER MISSION.
PROBABLY MY
LAST.

LET'S
JUST GET
ON WITH IT
THEN.



~SIGH~ MY
BOY. MY LITTLE
WARRIOR. DO YOU
REALLY THINK **THAT'S**
WHY WE CAME HERE?
SO THAT I COULD
TAUNT YOU?
TORTURE YOU?

I'VE TOLD YOU
SO MANY TIMES,
AND YET STILL YOU
REFUSE TO BELIEVE--
EVER SINCE THE DAY I
FIRST LAID EYES ON YOU,
I HAVE LOVED YOU
LIKE YOU WERE
MY OWN.



BUT YOU
ARE **NOT** MY OWN.
I HAVE ALWAYS
UNDERSTOOD
THAT.

I DIDN'T
BRING YOU
HERE TO GIVE
YOU ANOTHER
MISSION--

STEVEN?



NOW.

Steve Rogers
is Hydra.

Captain America
is Hydra. Which
means one thing--

--we are all
screwed!

One glance at the trouble map, and
I can see where it's all headed. His
plan's already underway. Would be
nearly impossible to stop him now--

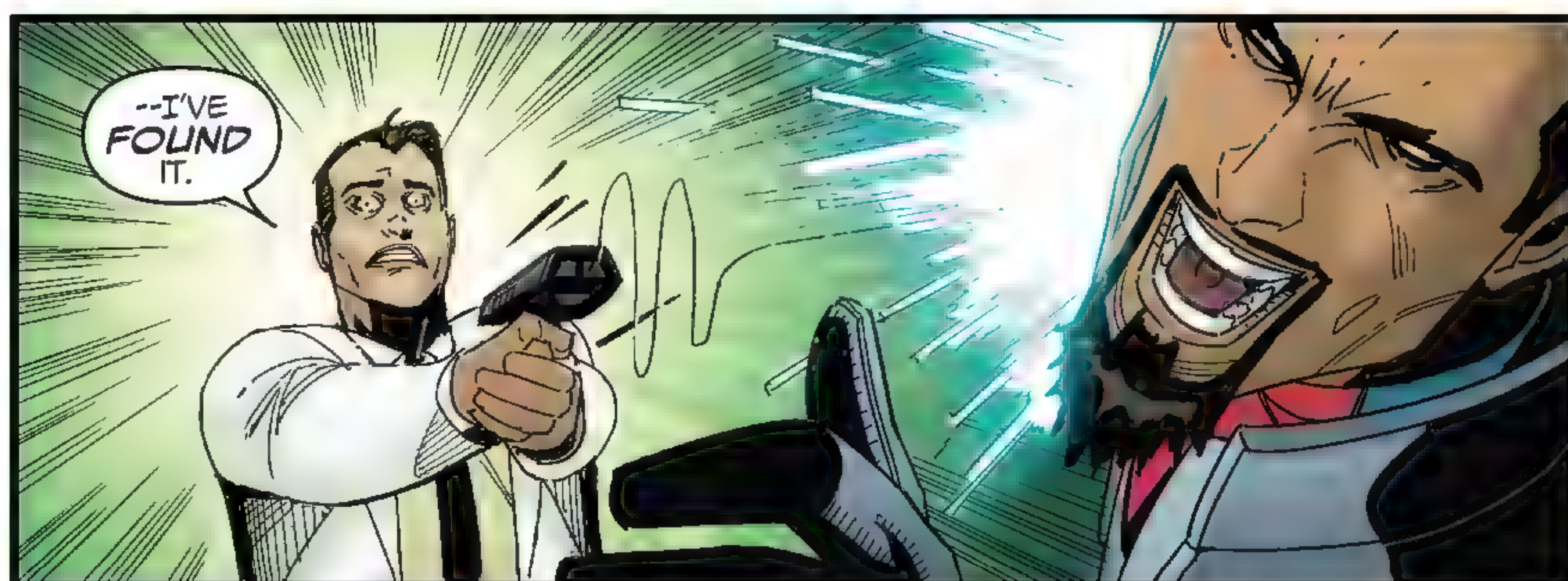
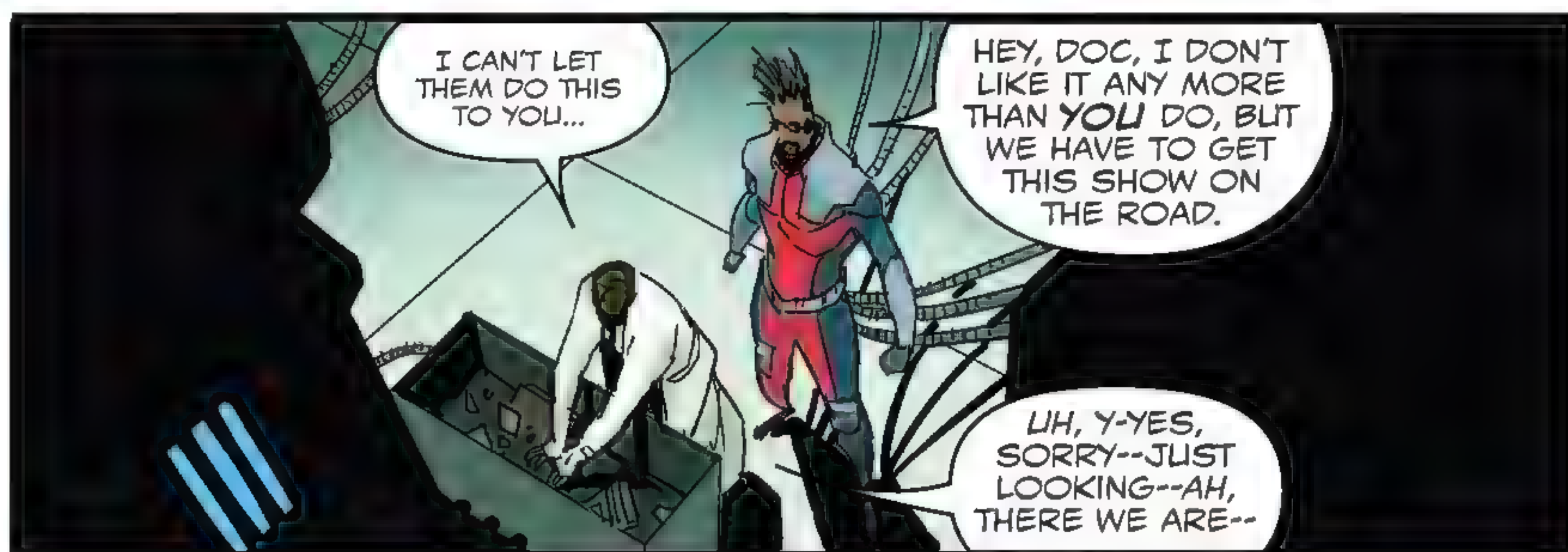
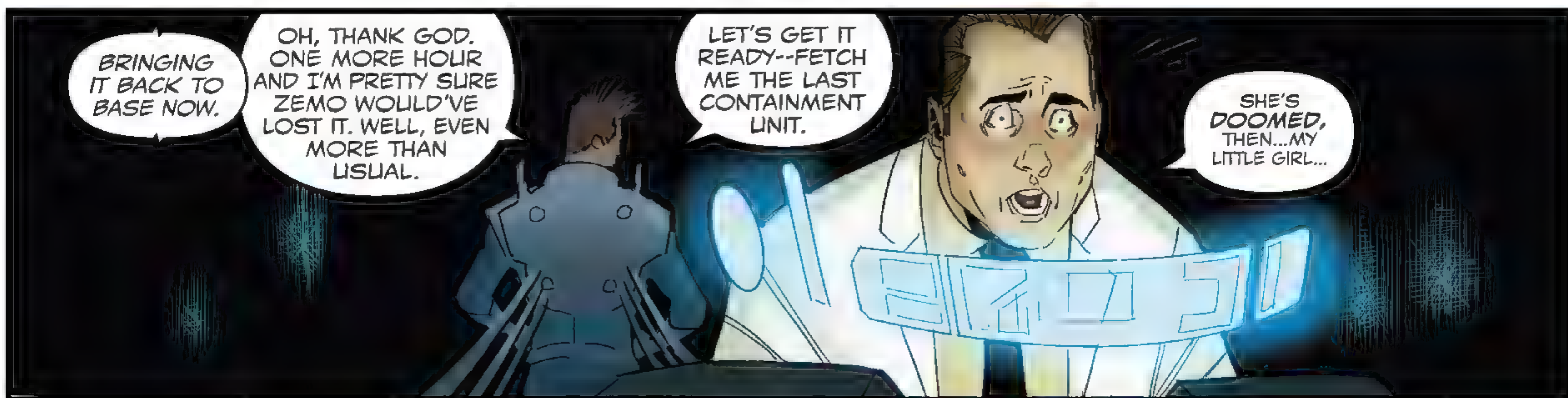
--and besides, I
don't have much
time before they
catch up to me.

Gotta use my one
phone call wisely.

Only takes a second to
realize there's only one
person who can still bring
down S.H.I.E.L.D. from the
inside--one person who
could get the message
out to the whole world--

--God help
us all.

Y'ELLO.
GO FOR RICK
JONES.





THERE IS NO NEED TO STRUGGLE ANY MORE, BARNES--



--YOU'LL FIND PEACE SOON ENOUGH.

ZEMO--

DO YOU LIKE IT? THIS LAB, I MEAN--I HAD THEM RE-CREATE IT--A PERFECT REPLICA...



...OF THE PLACE YOU MURDERED MY FATHER.

I MURDERED HIM?! HEINRICH ZEMO TRIED TO KILL ME AND STEVE--HE'S THE REASON I WAS TURNED INTO THE WINTER SOLDIER. HE'S THE ONE WHO TRAPPED STEVE IN THE ICE! HE WAS A MADMAN--



--JUST LIKE YOU.

--SIGH-- BUCKY, BUCKY...WHY DO YOU CLING TO THESE LIES? I KNOW THE GIRL SHOWED YOU THE TRUTH--

THE TRUTH? KOBIK IS A CONFUSED KID--WHATEVER SHE CHANGED--WHATEVER SHE DID TO STEVE--NONE OF IT'S REAL.



HH. HOW LITTLE YOU SEEM TO KNOW ABOUT THE MAN YOU CLAIM IS YOUR BROTHER.

BUT YOU SHOULD KNOW HE STILL CARES FOR YOU. I SUPPOSE NO MATTER WHAT THE REALITY, HE'S ALWAYS A SENTIMENTALIST--HE COULDN'T EVEN BRING HIMSELF TO BE HERE, IN FACT--



--BUT HE DID WANT ME TO GIVE YOU THIS MESSAGE.

HELLO, BUCKY--I'M SORRY I'M NOT THERE RIGHT NOW--



--YOU DESERVE A PROPER GOODBYE, AFTER ALL.

I--I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT NOT EVERYTHING YOU REMEMBER WAS FALSE. YOU WERE A GOOD AND LOYAL FRIEND DURING THE WAR. AND I DIDN'T ENJOY BETRAYING YOUR TRUST BACK THEN--



--BUT THE FACT IS, WE SERVE DIFFERENT SIDES. WE BELIEVE DIFFERENT THINGS. AND I THINK I KNOW YOU WELL ENOUGH TO UNDERSTAND I CAN NEVER CHANGE YOUR MIND ABOUT THAT.

AND UNFORTUNATELY, THERE'S ALSO THE FACT THAT, NO MATTER WHAT YOU REMEMBER, YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEATH OF A GREAT MAN.



AND HELMUT DESERVES JUSTICE FOR THAT. I WISH--

TURN IT OFF.

SORRY?



I SAID TURN IT OFF!

BUT I DON'T UNDERSTAND. YOUR DEAR STEVE ROGERS, YOUR CLOSEST FRIEND AND ALLY--

THAT'S NOT STEVE.



THAT'S NOT STEVE.



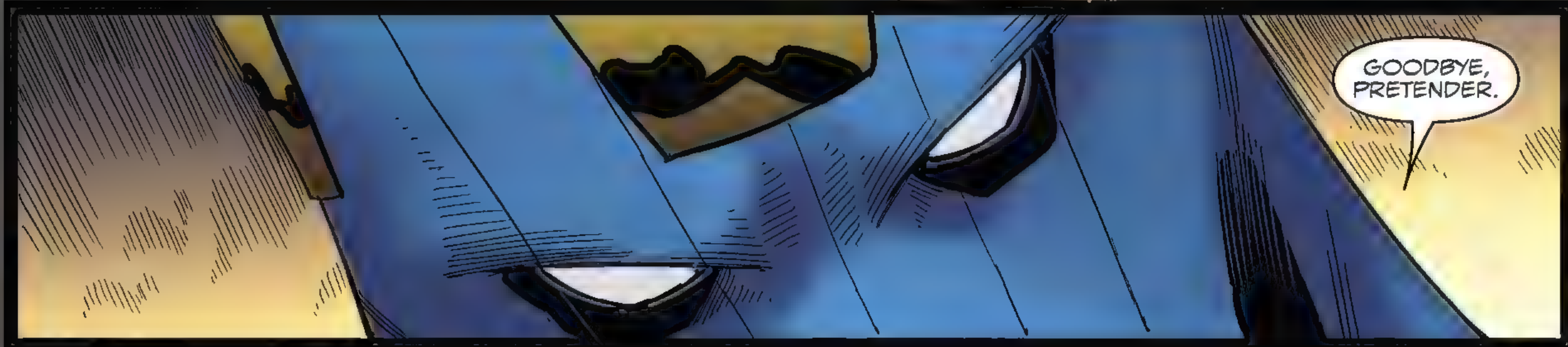
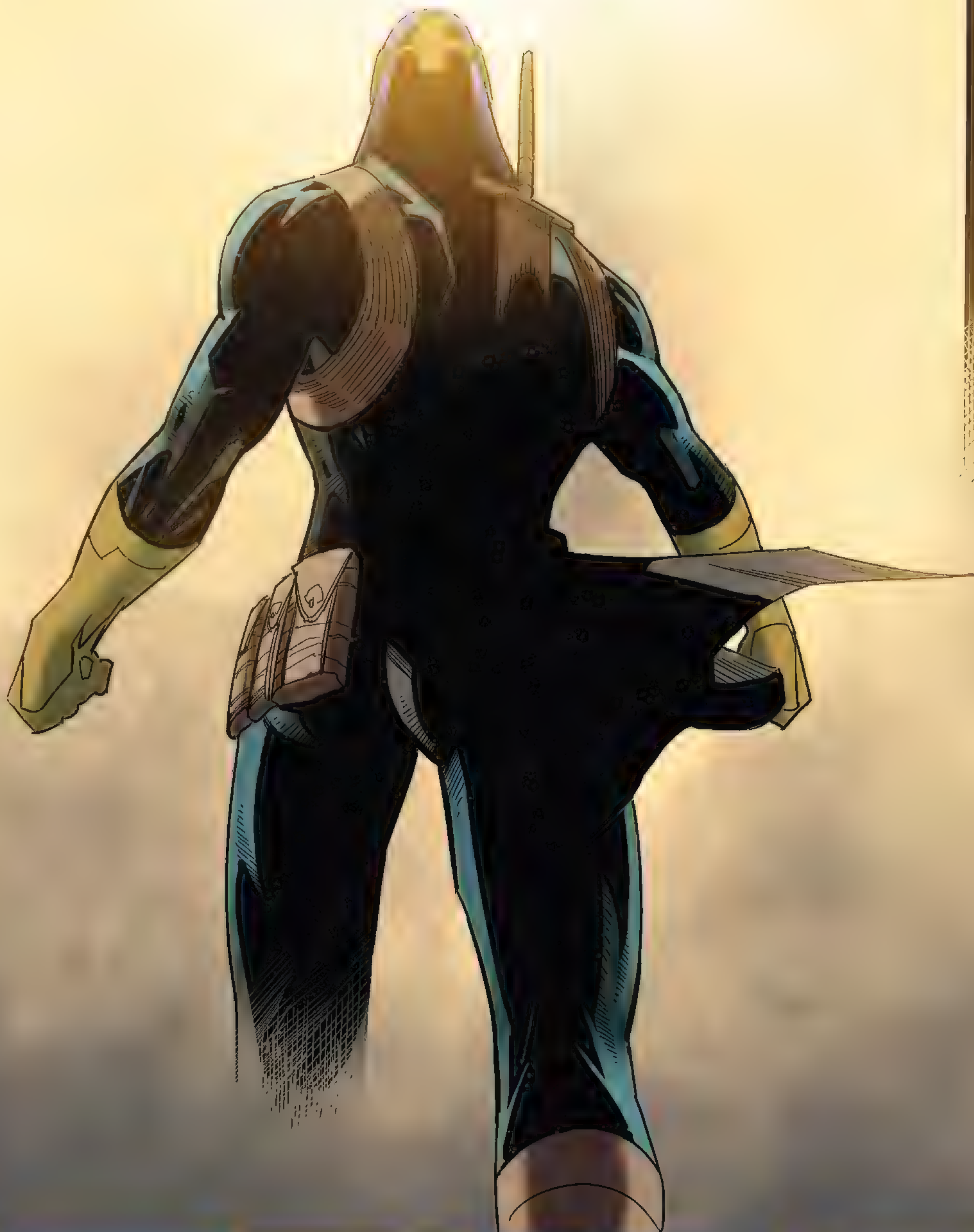
IT'S NOT TRUE... IT'S NOT TRUE...

TSK. POOR BUCKY. YOU STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND, DO YOU? FACTS, REALITY--THESE THINGS ARE SIMPLY WHAT WE MAKE THEM.

I HAVE DECIDED WHAT I BELIEVE. AND IF THIS STORY STEVEN TELLS IS A LIE--



--THEN I
WILL MAKE
IT TRUE.



GOODBYE,
PRETENDER.

1945.

I'M SURPRISED TO SEE YOU UP SO EARLY--

--GIVEN HOW LATE INTO THE NIGHT I HEARD ALL THE REMINISCING AND LAUGHTER.

I HOPE WE DIDN'T KEEP YOU UP...

NONSENSE, IT WAS MUSIC TO MY EARS.

SO ALL THOSE YEARS AGO--

ONE OF THOSE BRUTES THAT ACCOMPANIED ME DID IN FACT **STRIKE** HER--AND I'M SORRY FOR THAT, STEVEN. TRUST THAT HE WAS SEVERELY REPRIMANDED.

BUT IT WAS LITTLE MORE THAN A BUMP ON THE HEAD.

AND SINCE THEN, SHE'S BEEN VERY WELL-PROVIDED-FOR--

I KNOW.

AND WE KEPT HER CLOSELY INFORMED ON HOW YOU WERE DOING-- PHOTOGRAPHS, REPORT CARDS, SOME OF YOUR DRAWINGS, EVEN--

ELISA--

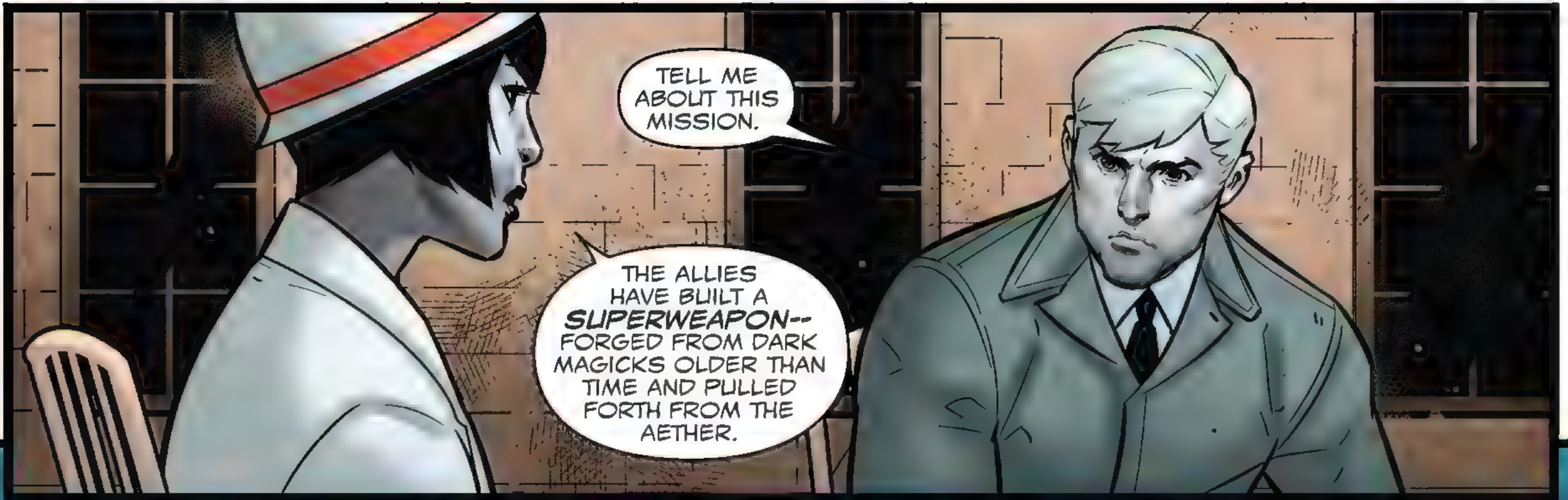
--I KNOW.

I ONLY WISH YOU COULD HAVE BEEN REUNITED SOONER. BUT WE KNEW IF YOU WERE TO BECOME EVERYTHING WE NEEDED YOU TO BE--

THIS HAD TO BE THE WAY. I UNDERSTAND. AND I'M SORRY FOR THE THINGS I SAID BEFORE--

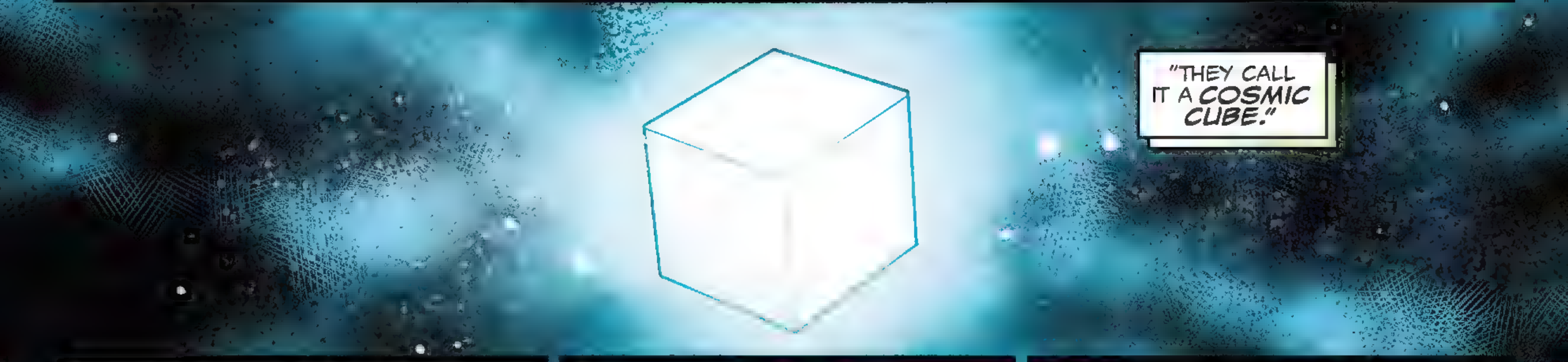
NONSENSE, DEAR BOY. WE ALL FACE CRISES OF FAITH FROM TIME TO TIME.

WELL, IT'S OVER NOW.



TELL ME ABOUT THIS MISSION.

THE ALLIES HAVE BUILT A **SUPERWEAPON**-- FORGED FROM DARK MAGICKS OLDER THAN TIME AND PULLED FORTH FROM THE AETHER.



"THEY CALL IT A **COSMIC CUBE**."



WITH IT, THEY WILL BE ABLE TO CHANGE REALITY ITSELF. MAKE IT SO THEY, NOT HYDRA, WIN THE WAR. RESHAPE THE WORLD AS THEY SEE FIT, MAKE US ALL BELIEVE WE HAVE LED DIFFERENT LIVES--

THAT--THAT'S **IMPOSSIBLE**.

IT IS **NOT**. THE SIGHT HAS SHOWN ME. BUT THAT IS NOT **ALL** THAT IT REVEALED TO ME...



YOU WILL SURVIVE THE CHANGE. MANY YEARS FROM NOW, YOU WILL AWAKEN FROM THE LIE THEY BUILD FOR YOU--

--AND YOU WILL RESTORE EVERYTHING THEY TOOK FROM US.



IT WILL NOT BE EASY. YOU WILL BE A STRANGER IN A STRANGE WORLD. YOUR FRIENDS WILL BELIEVE THEMSELVES TO BE YOUR ENEMIES, AND YOUR ENEMIES YOUR FRIENDS.

YOU WILL BE A MAN OUT OF NOT ONLY TIME, BUT **REALITY ITSELF**.



YOU WILL HAVE TO HIDE YOUR TRUE SELF FROM EVERYONE AROUND YOU. AND YOU WILL SACRIFICE SO MUCH. I WOULD GIVE **ANYTHING** TO SHIELD YOU FROM THIS BURDEN, MY DEAR--

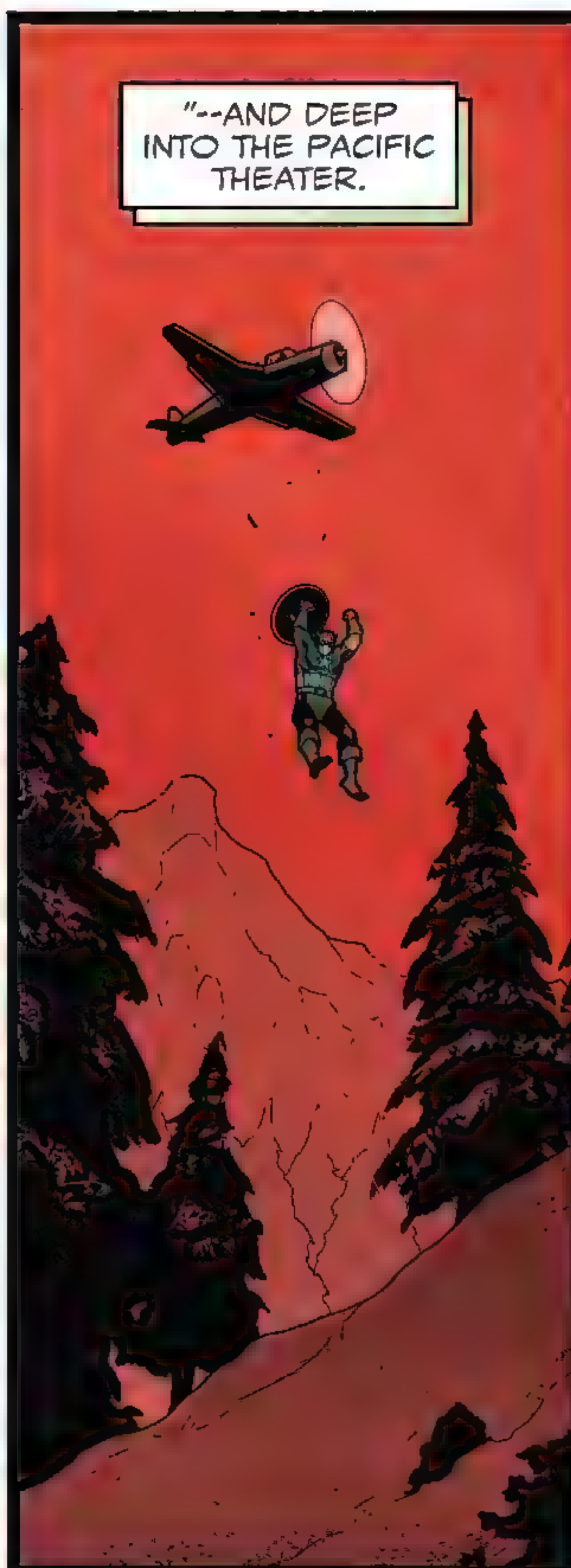
ELISA...



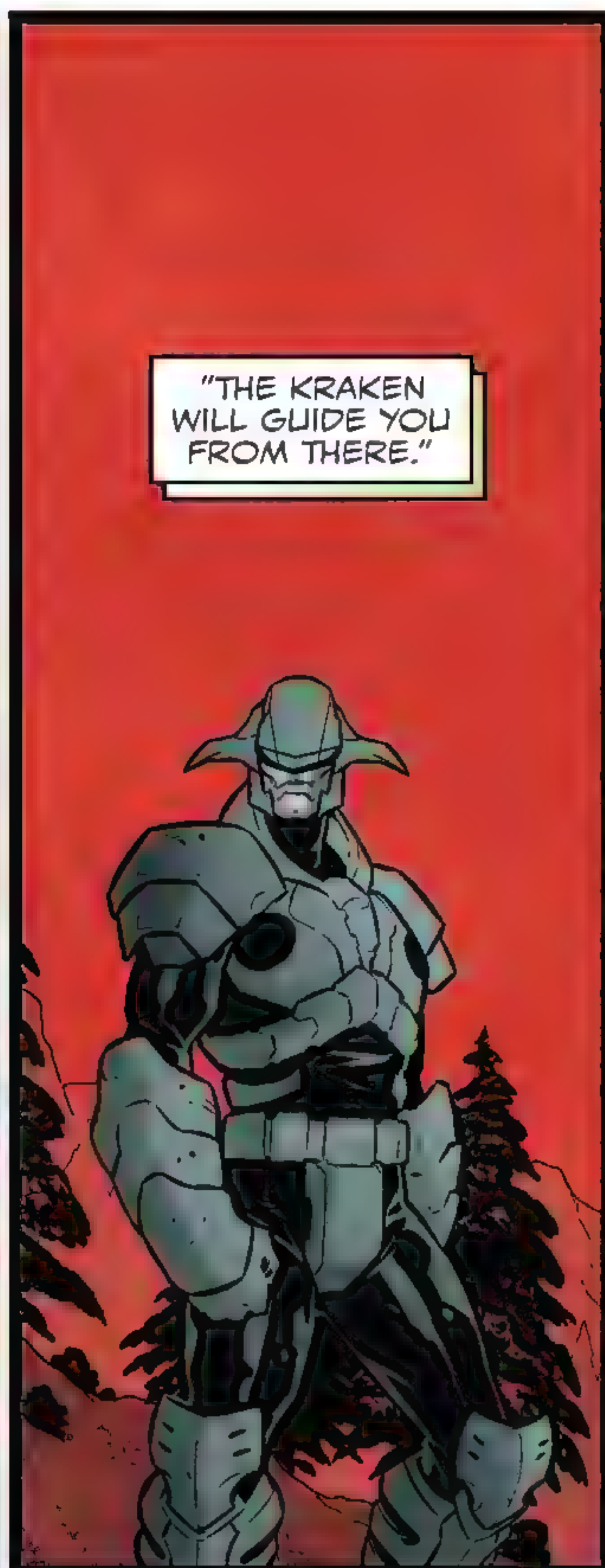
...WHAT DO YOU NEED ME TO DO?

FIRST, YOU WILL GO FREE YOUR FRIEND HELMUT, AND HELP HIM GET THE VENGEANCE HE SO DESERVES. BUT YOU WILL TELL HIM NOTHING OF THIS MISSION.

FROM THERE, A PLANE WILL TAKE YOU FAR FROM HERE--



--AND DEEP INTO THE PACIFIC THEATER.



"THE KRAKEN WILL GUIDE YOU FROM THERE."



THE PLACE HE WILL TAKE YOU IS THE ONE HE WAS SWORN TO PROTECT. THE SOURCE OF ALL OUR POWER. WHERE HYDRA WAS BIRTHED.

THERE, YOU WILL BE SORELY TESTED, BODY AND SOUL. BUT IT IS THE KEY TO YOUR SURVIVING THE CHANGE.

I UNDERSTAND. BUT, ELISA... IF EVERYTHING IS CHANGED--WHAT ABOUT MY MOTHER? HELMUT? WHAT ABOUT YOU?



ON THIS, THE SIGHT IS UNCLEAR. BUT KNOW THIS, STEVEN--

--I WILL CALL UPON THE ELDER GODS. I WILL CONSULT THE FORBIDDEN BOOKS. I WILL SELL MY OWN SOUL IF I HAVE TO. NO MATTER WHAT IT TAKES--

"--WE WILL BE TOGETHER AGAIN SOMEDAY."

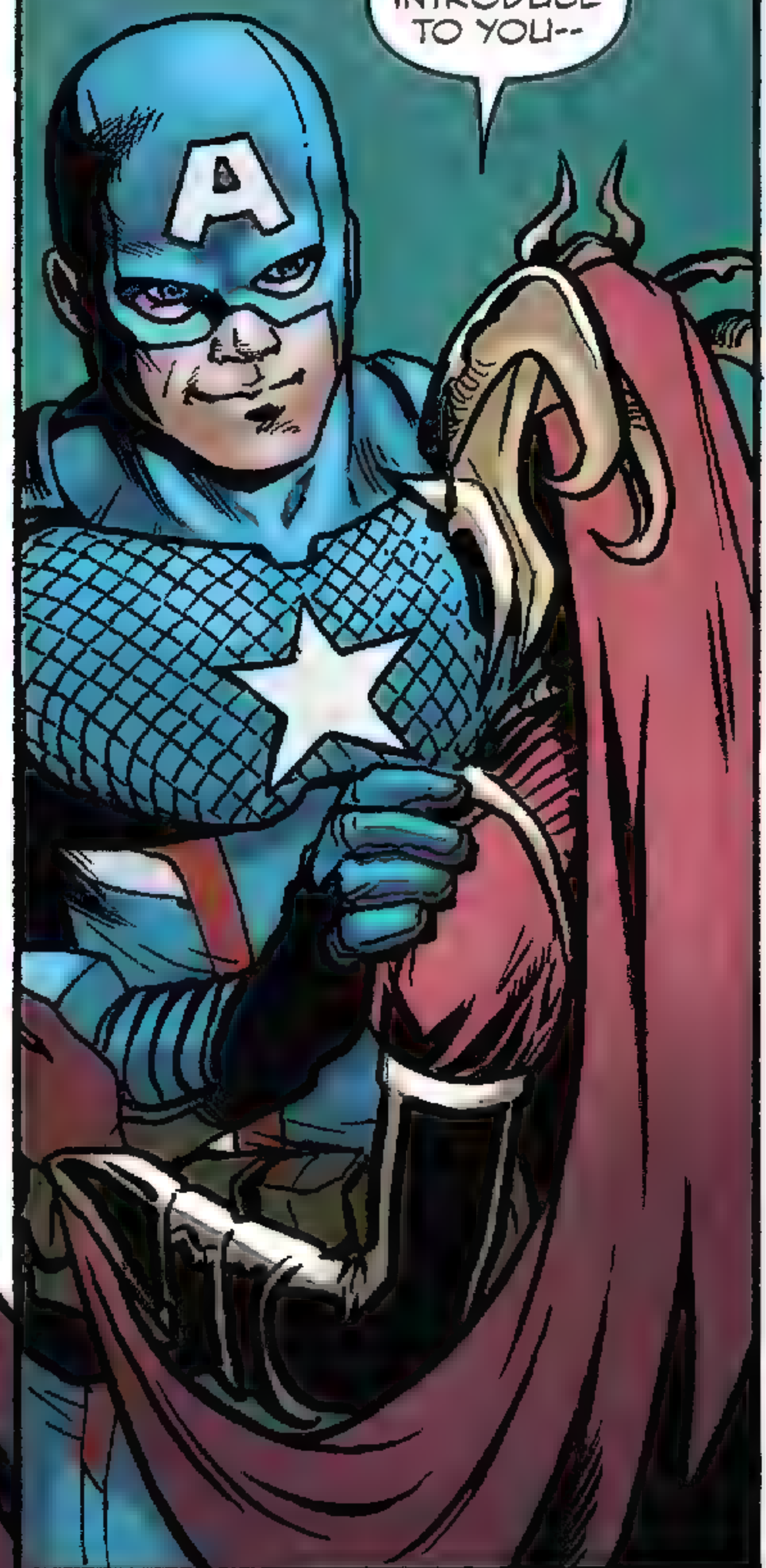
NOW.



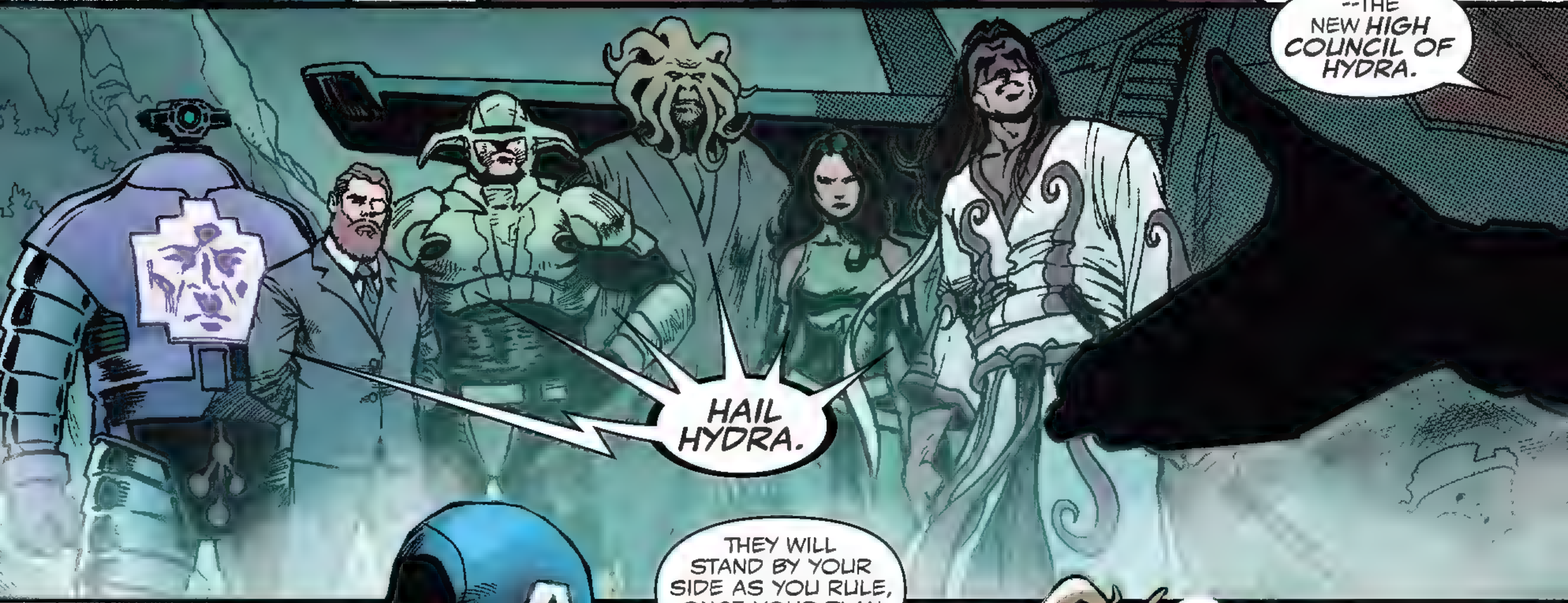
I STILL CAN'T BELIEVE IT--YOU'RE HERE.

I PROMISED YOU, DIDN'T I? YOU KNOW HOW I AM ABOUT SUCH THINGS, SILLY BOY. OH, AND I BROUGHT YOU A PRESENT.

MAY I INTRODUCE TO YOU--



--THE NEW HIGH COUNCIL OF HYDRA.



HAIL HYDRA.

THEY WILL STAND BY YOUR SIDE AS YOU RULE, ONCE YOUR PLAN IS REALIZED--

RIGHT-- ABOUT THE PLAN-- I'M AFRAID THERE HAVE BEEN SOME LAST-MINUTE HICUPS--

YOU MEAN YOU LACK XAVIER'S BRAIN. NOT TO WORRY, MY DEAR. PRESUMING THE DIRECTOR OF S.H.I.E.L.D. CAN REACH OUT TO HIS WAITING SHIP--



**S.H.I.E.L.D.
HELICARRIER
CRESCENT.**

ALL RIGHT,
LOOK ALIVE,
PEOPLE--WE
ARE ENTERING
SOKOVIAN
AIRSPACE.

THE COUNTRY
HAS OFFICIALLY
SURRENDERED TO A
HYDRA INSURGENCY, WHICH
IS NOW THREATENING OUR
MEMBER NATIONS' CAPITALS
WITH NUCLEAR RETALIATION
IF THEIR DEMANDS
AREN'T MET.

OUR JOB
IS TO TAKE
AWAY THEIR
LEVERAGE.

WE HAVE
THE ELEMENT
OF SURPRISE,
SO FIGHTERS,
PREPARE TO
LAUNCH--

AHEM,
IF I MAY
INTERRUPT--YOUR
SELF HAS BEEN
UNSHACKLED.

YOU FEEL
THE CALMNESS
WASH OVER YOU,
YOU FEEL IT MAKE
YOU STILL, AND
PRESENT.

YOU ARE
PERFECTLY
CONTENT.

THERE IS
NO NEED TO
FIGHT...

...NO
NEED TO BE
AFRAID...

...YOU
NO LONGER
HAVE TO
STRUGGLE.

FAUSTUS
IS YOUR
MASTER
NOW.



--THEY'LL BE PATIENTLY WAITING TO WELCOME US ON BOARD...SUPREME LEADER.

THANK YOU, DOCTOR. NOW THAT THAT'S TAKEN CARE OF--

HOLD ON NOW, WE AIN'T OUT OF THE WOODS YET.



SORRY, LIH-- HAIL HYDRA, BOSS.

THAT'S NEVER NOT GONNA BE WEIRD.

TASKMASTER. WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

WE BEEN MONITORING MARIA HILL--SENT A SQUAD AFTER HER, EVEN. BUT LOOKS LIKE SHE'S MAKIN' A PHONE CALL, TO YOUR OLD PAL--



"--RICK JONES."

RICK-- IT'S HILL!

LIKE, MARIA HILL? THE ONE THAT GOT FIRED? WOW, IF YOU'RE CALLING ME FOR A REFERENCE, I AM STILL TECHNICALLY A FELON--



LISTEN TO ME, IDIOT--WE DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME--YOU HAVE TO HELP ME STOP HIM--

SORRY, STOP WHO?

STEVE ROGERS--



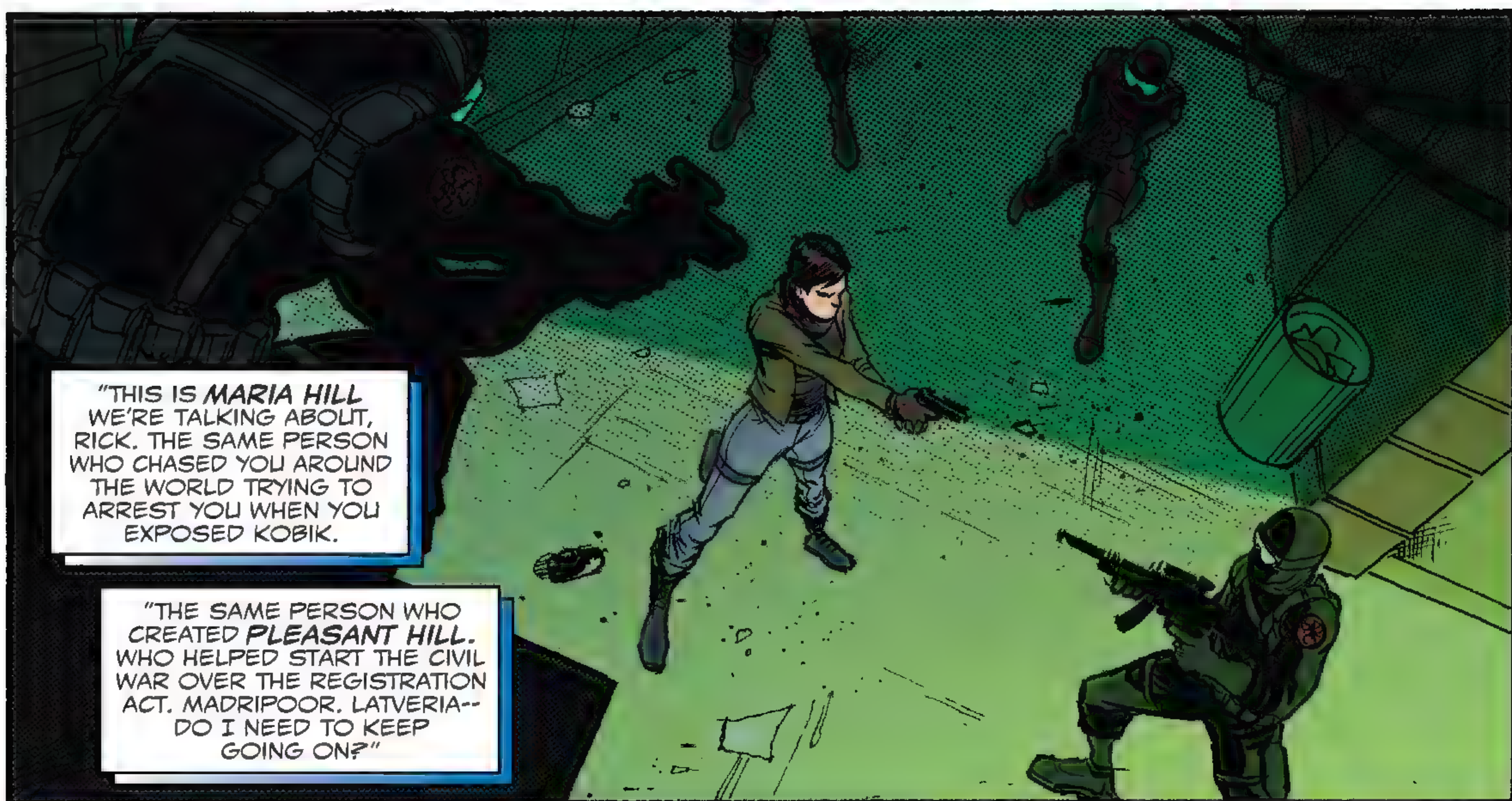
--STEVE ROGERS IS HYDRA!



WHAAA

RICK-- RICK, ARE YOU THERE? IT'S CAP--

PLEASE HOLD.





--I'DA
MADE
THE SAME
BET.



JONES
IS DOWN. ALL
THE CODES GO
THROUGH?

YES, THIS
IS EVERYTHING
WE'LL NEED TO GET
INSIDE...IT'S GOOD
WORK. GET RICK INTO
HOLDING--DO NOT
HURT HIM.

UNDERSTOOD,
WEIRD
CAPTAIN HYDRA
GUY. BLACK
ANT OUT.



IF THAT'S
ALL FINISHED,
YOUR TROOPS ARE
ASSEMBLED IN THE
MOUNTAINS. THEY ARE
WAITING TO HEAR
FROM THEIR NEW
LEADER.

YEAH--WE
SET UP THE
SCREENS, BUT THEY
WON'T BE ABLE TO
SEE YOUR FACE,
DON'T WORRY.

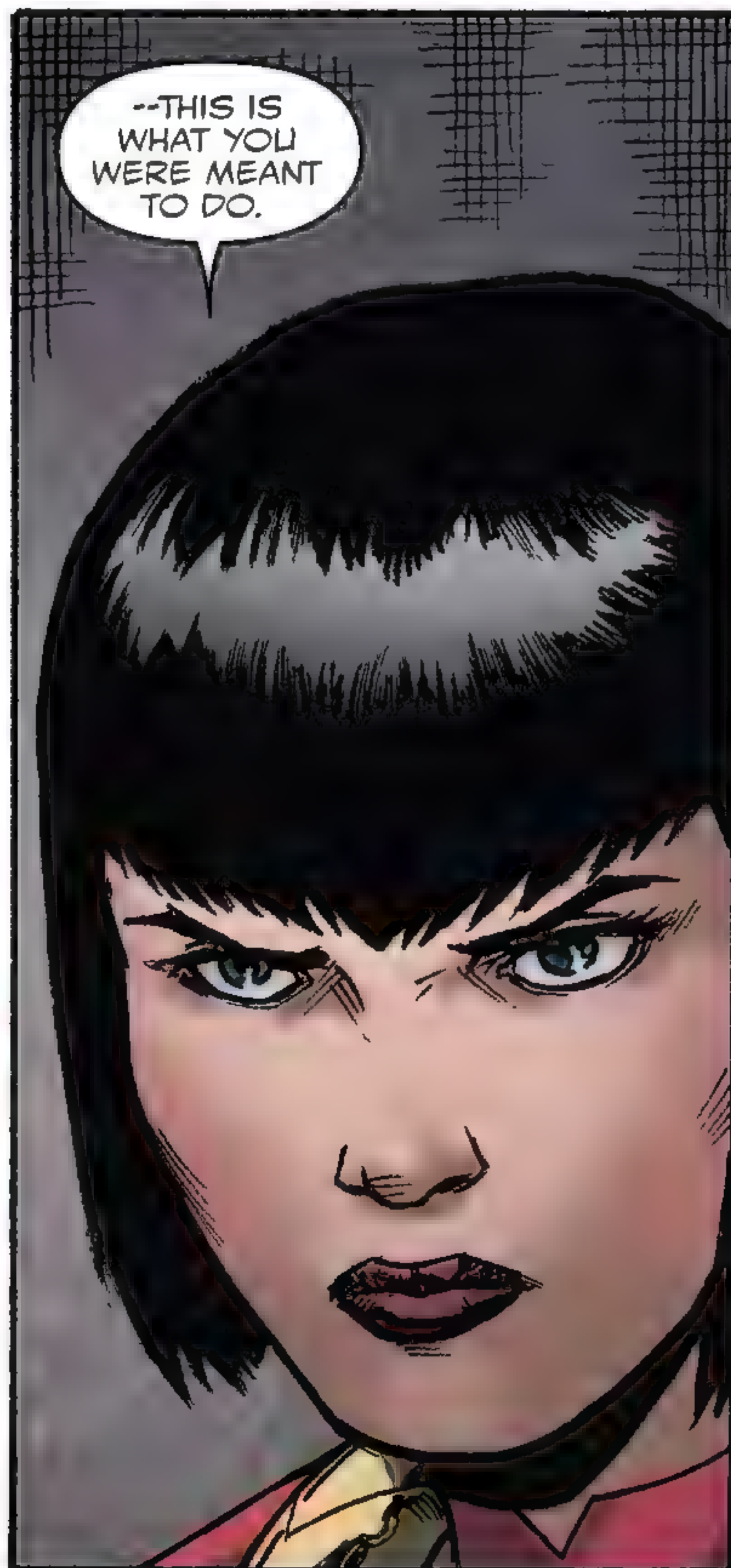
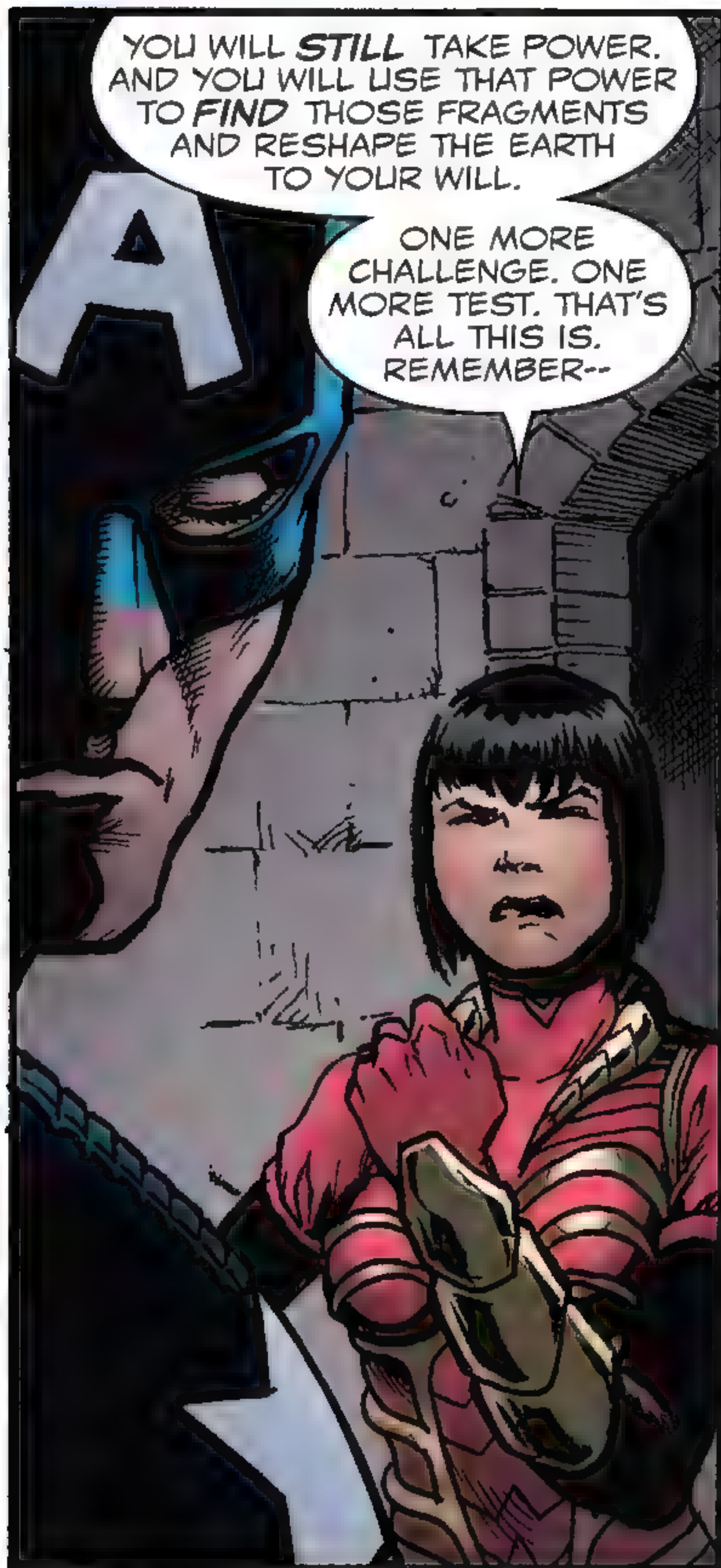
GOOD.

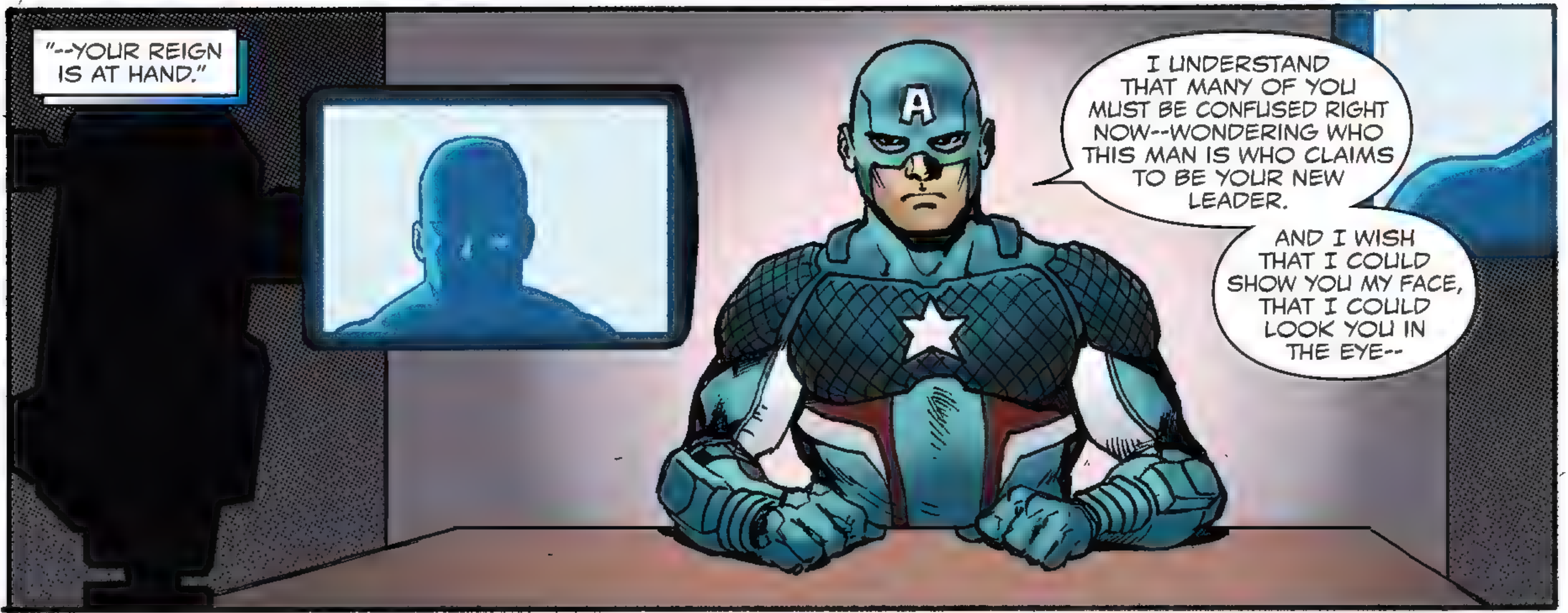


THIS IS IT,
THEN, YES? IT'S ALL
FINALLY HAPPENING.
YOUR PLAN IS
ABOUT TO BE
REALIZED--

ACTUALLY,
STEVEN--

--THERE IS
SOMETHING I
NEED TO TELL
YOU FIRST.

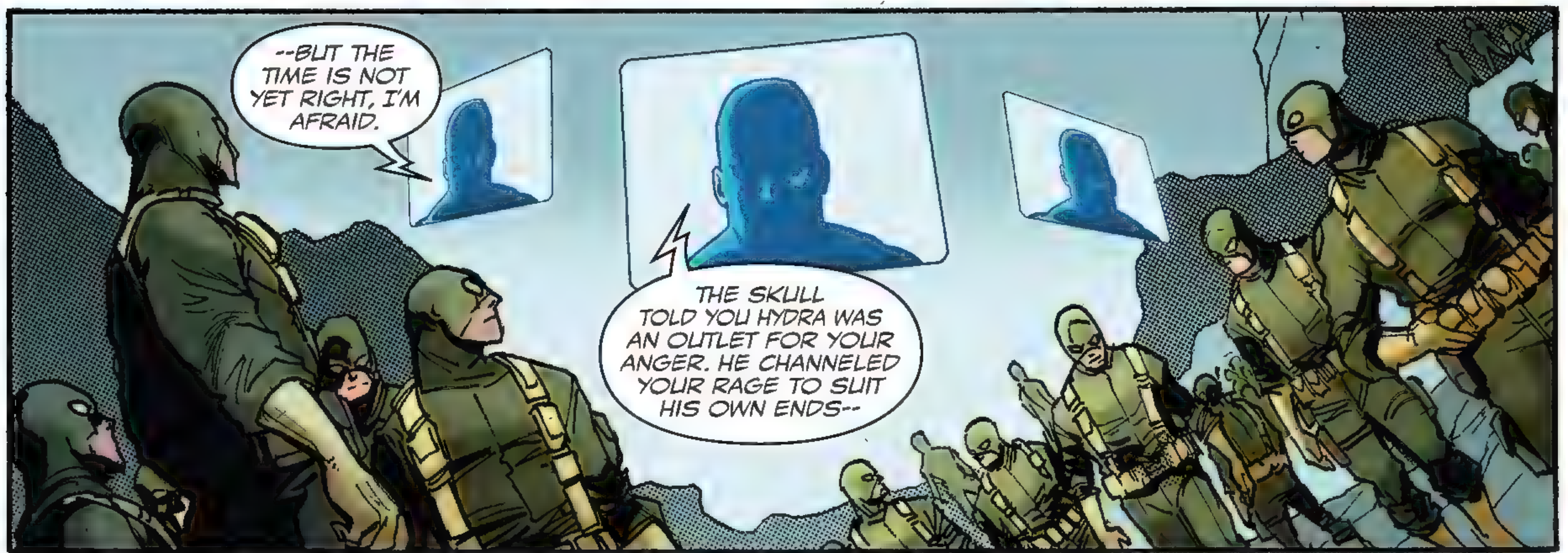




"--YOUR REIGN IS AT HAND."

I UNDERSTAND THAT MANY OF YOU MUST BE CONFUSED RIGHT NOW--WONDERING WHO THIS MAN IS WHO CLAIMS TO BE YOUR NEW LEADER.

AND I WISH THAT I COULD SHOW YOU MY FACE, THAT I COULD LOOK YOU IN THE EYE--



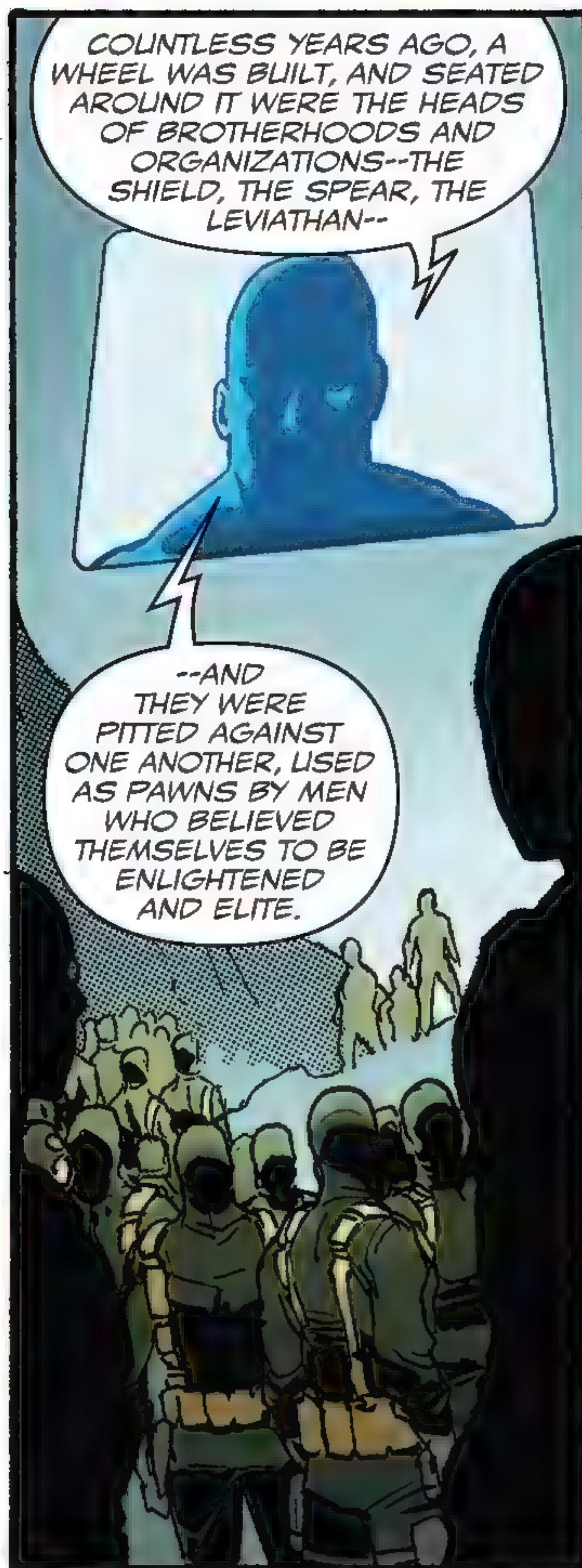
--BUT THE TIME IS NOT YET RIGHT, I'M AFRAID.

THE SKULL TOLD YOU HYDRA WAS AN OUTLET FOR YOUR ANGER. HE CHanneled YOUR RAGE TO SUIT HIS OWN ENDS--



--BUT I AM HERE TO TELL YOU THAT HYDRA IS SO MUCH MORE.

IT HAS EXISTED SINCE THE DAWN OF MAN, PERSEVERED THROUGH DYNASTIES AND EMPIRES. TO BELONG TO IT IS TO BELONG TO SOMETHING FAR GREATER THAN YOURSELVES.



COUNTLESS YEARS AGO, A WHEEL WAS BUILT, AND SEATED AROUND IT WERE THE HEADS OF BROTHERHOODS AND ORGANIZATIONS--THE SHIELD, THE SPEAR, THE LEVIATHAN--

--AND THEY WERE PITTED AGAINST ONE ANOTHER, USED AS PAWNS BY MEN WHO BELIEVED THEMSELVES TO BE ENLIGHTENED AND ELITE.



WELL, I AM HERE TO END ALL THAT. I WILL NOT BE RULED BY THE WHEEL--I WILL RULE IT INSTEAD.

AND ALL OF US WILL BE PAWNS NO LONGER.



"THROUGH HYDRA,
WE WILL BE
MADE STRONG.
TOGETHER."



"WE WILL FIGHT
TO FORGE A
BETTER WORLD."

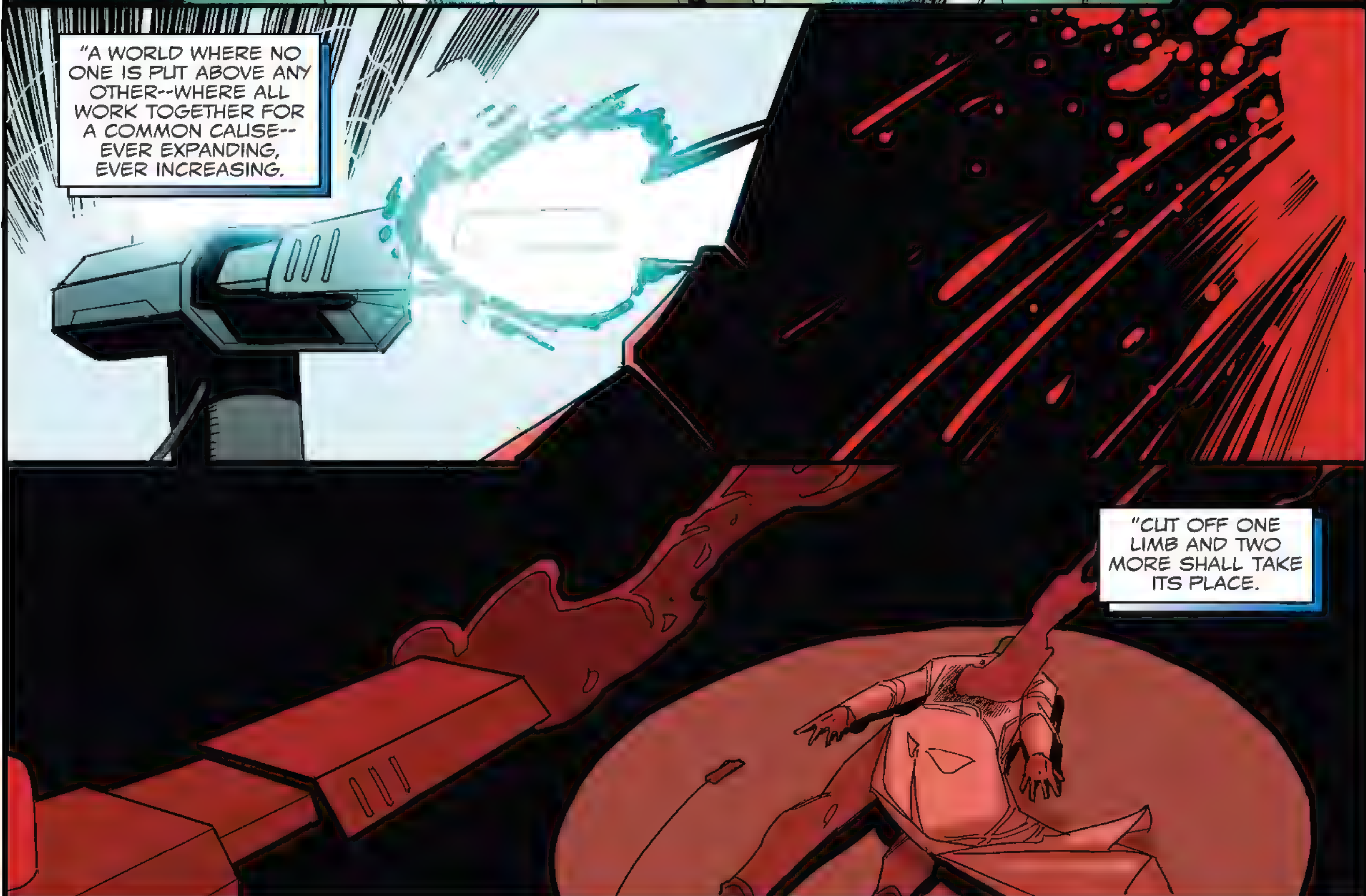
CHK!



"NO MATTER
THE COST."

CLICK!

HAIL
HYDRA!



"A WORLD WHERE NO
ONE IS PUT ABOVE ANY
OTHER--WHERE ALL
WORK TOGETHER FOR
A COMMON CAUSE--
EVER EXPANDING,
EVER INCREASING."

"CUT OFF ONE
LIMB AND TWO
MORE SHALL TAKE
ITS PLACE."



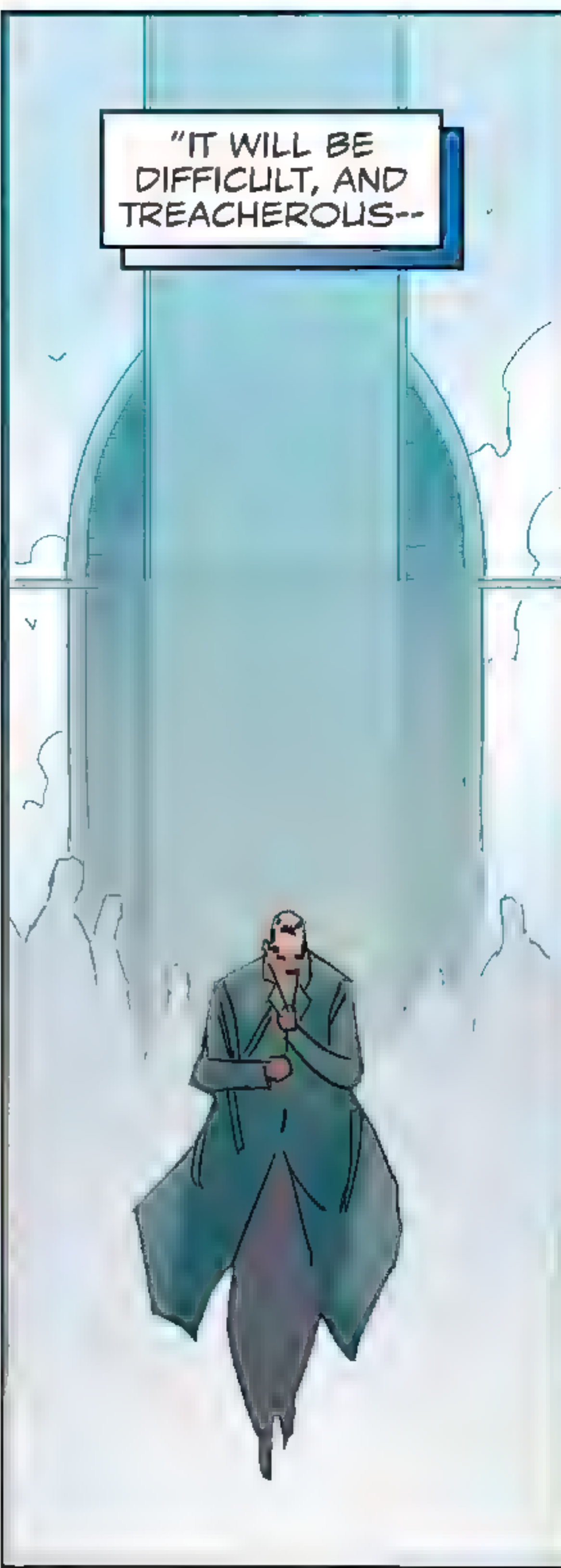
WELCOME TO THE PLANETARY DEFENSE SHIELD BASE STATION--

"I WILL NOT LIE TO YOU LIKE THE SKULL DID--"



"--THE PATH IN FRONT OF US IS NOT ANY EASY ONE.

JAMES Q. REED
S.H.I.E.L.D. TECHNICAL SUPPORT
CLEAR FOR ENTRY



"IT WILL BE DIFFICULT, AND TREACHEROUS--"



HAIL HYDRA!

"--AND ALL OF US WILL BE CALLED UPON TO SACRIFICE.



"BUT KNOW THAT WE ARE STRIVING FOR SOMETHING WORTHY..."



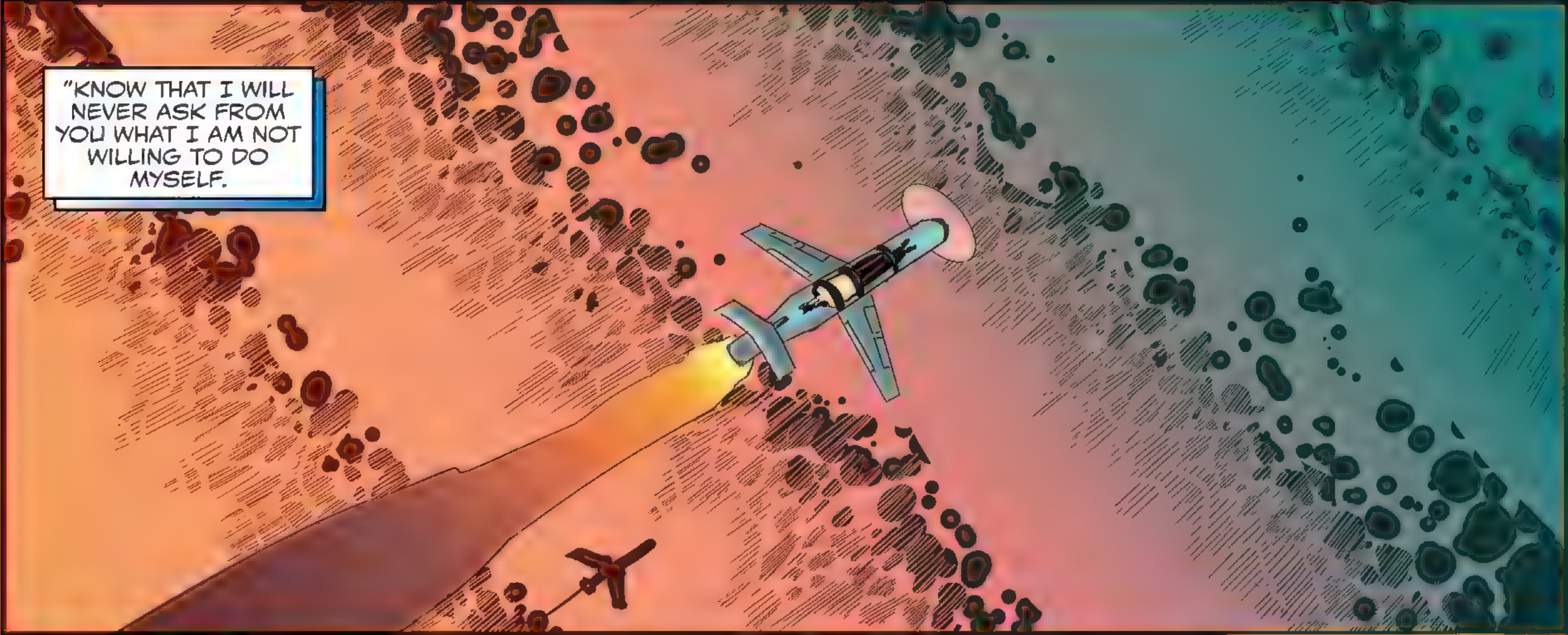
"UNITED, WE WILL ACHIEVE THE IMPOSSIBLE.

CAPTAIN MARVEL-- SHIELD'S DOWN, MA'AM!

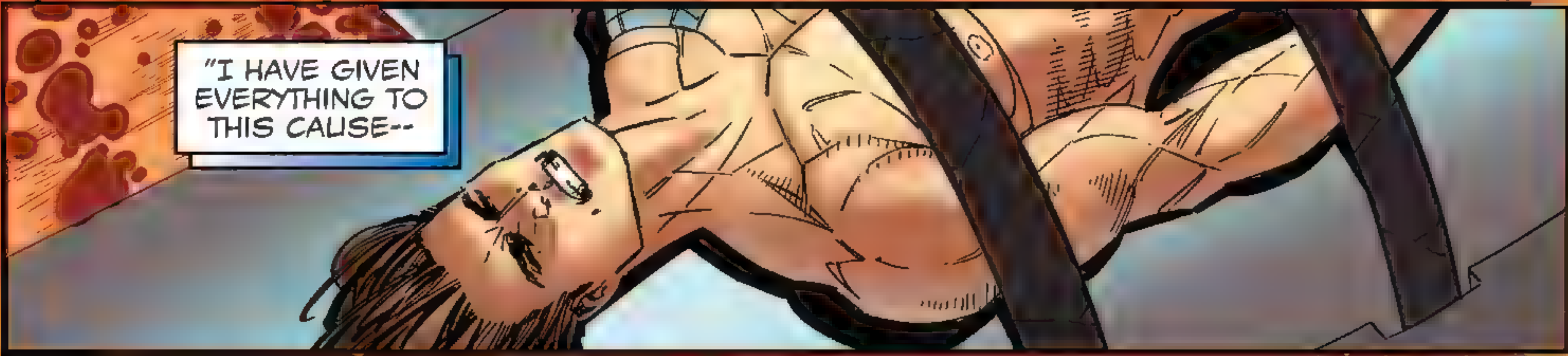
WHAT?! THE WAVE HASN'T EVEN HIT YET--

NOT THE WAVE, MA'AM-- SOMEONE'S HIT THE BASE STATION!

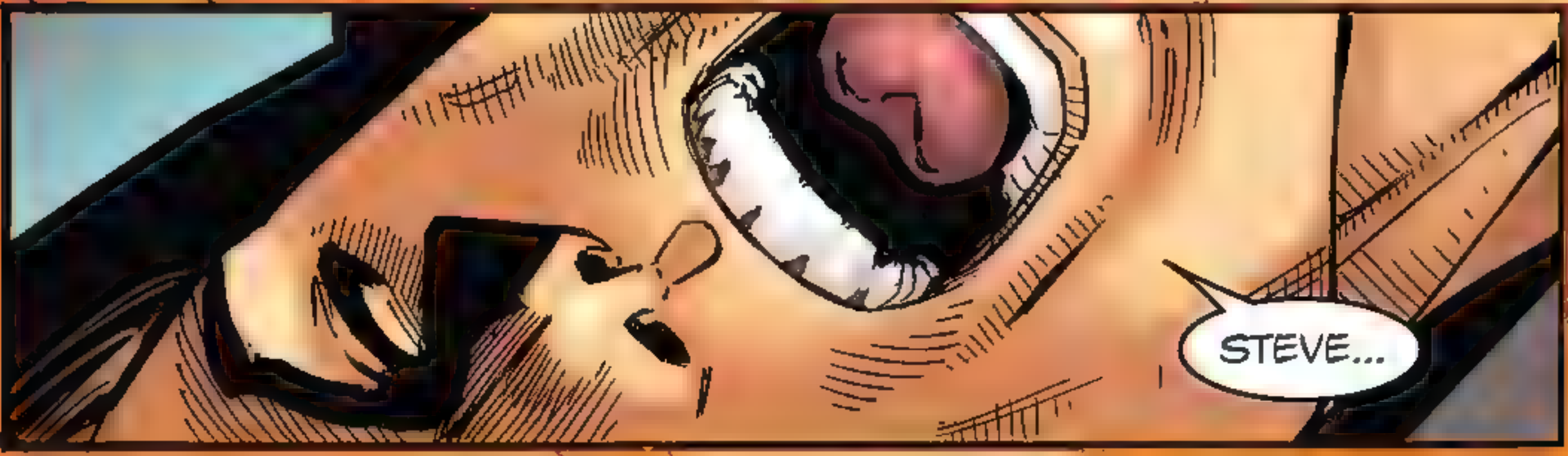
INCOMING



"KNOW THAT I WILL
NEVER ASK FROM
YOU WHAT I AM NOT
WILLING TO DO
MYSELF.



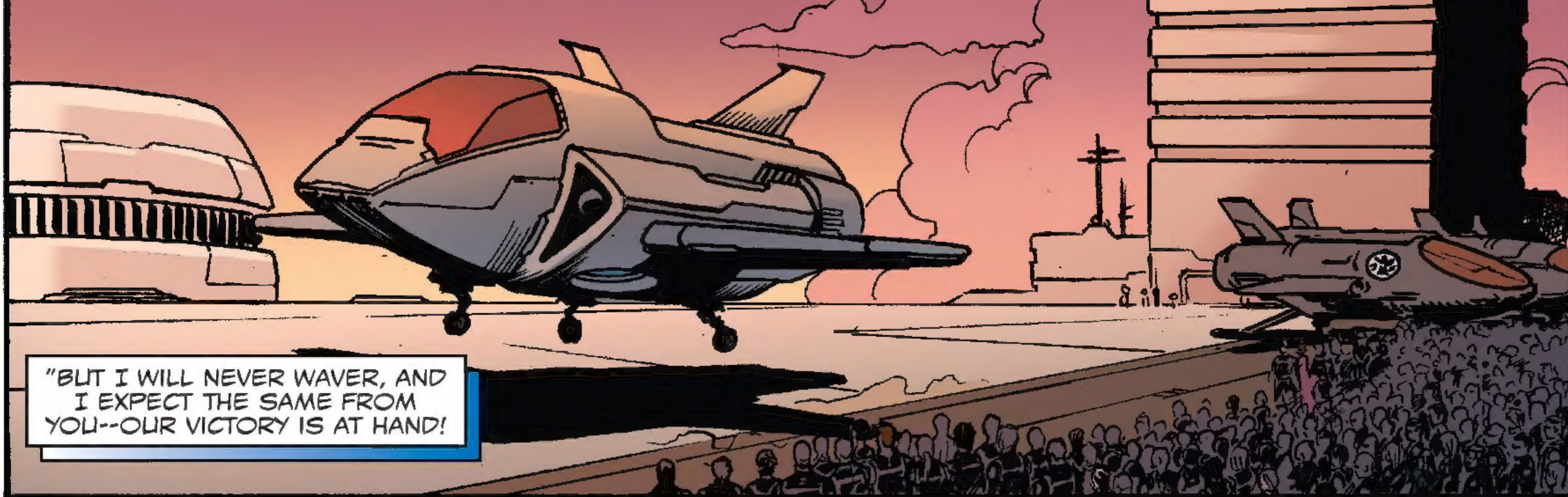
"I HAVE GIVEN
EVERYTHING TO
THIS CAUSE--



STEVE...



--AND I
HAVE PAID A
TERRIBLE
PRICE.



"BUT I WILL NEVER WAVER, AND
I EXPECT THE SAME FROM
YOU--OUR VICTORY IS AT HAND!"



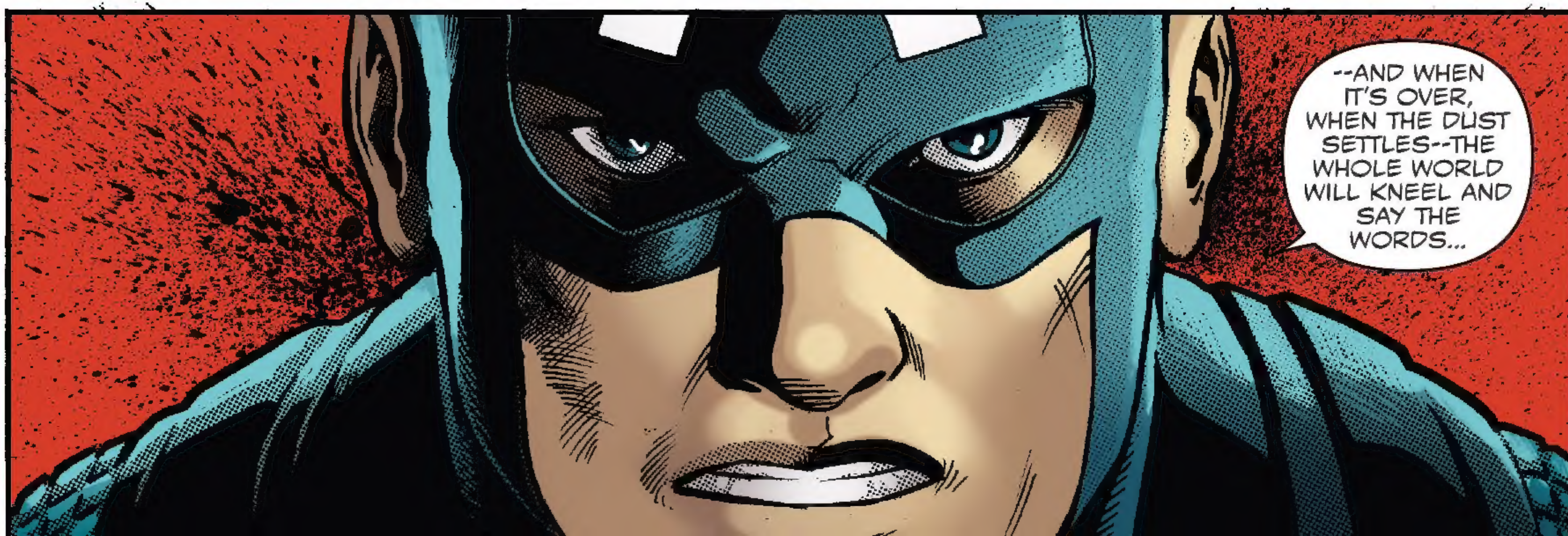
"WE WILL EXPOSE THOSE
WHO CLAIM TO LEAD
US--WE WILL LAY BARE
THEIR WEAKNESS, AND
THEIR CORRUPTION!"



"WE WILL BRING
ORDER AND
STRENGTH TO
THE CHAOS!"



"THIS IS THE
HOUR, THIS IS
THE PLACE--NOW,
EVERYTHING
CHANGES--"



--AND WHEN
IT'S OVER,
WHEN THE DUST
SETTLES--THE
WHOLE WORLD
WILL KNEEL AND
SAY THE
WORDS...

HAIL HYDRA!



NEXT

SECRET EMPIRE

#0



SECRET EMPIRE: OPENING SALVO



STEVE ROGERS: CAPTAIN AMERICA #17



THUNDERBOLTS #12



U.S. AVENGERS #5

